

**Political History Collection
Interview H.0001.10 : Tape 10**

Melvyn Goldstein, Editor

**Center for Research on Tibet
Department of Anthropology**

and

**Case Western Reserve University
Cleveland, Ohio**

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Location of Interview: Dharamsala, India
Date of Interview: October 1992
Language of Interview: Tibetan
Interviewed by: Paljor Tsarong
Name: Drakten [Tib. grags bstan]
Gender: Male
Age: 57
Date of Birth: 1935

Abstract

Drakten [Tib. grags bstan] was a monk official in the traditional Tibetan government who discusses in detail the political events that occurred in Lhasa in the 1950s. In this interview, he discusses Chinese farming, trading, and the Tibetan government's shortcomings on education and political awareness. He describes the quality and quantity of the vegetables grown by the Chinese, as well as the land it grew upon. He then describes the reluctance of the people to sell to the Chinese and the increase in prices. Finally, he discusses how in the late 1950s, politics effected trading between the Chinese and the people of India.

Tape 10

Q: Were food items being brought from the villages or were there Tibetan vegetable growers around Lhasa? And did the Chinese grow vegetables when it was said that the food situation was grave?

A: The Chinese grew a lot. Nortölinga was generally the grazing land for the Norbulinga stables and it was huge. The Chinese requested this and turned it into a vegetable field.

Q: How large was it?

A: It is very big. The area itself is one whole area.

Q: Earlier in Tibet, the measurement was in khe of seed, right?

A: In terms of khe. Oh, it is very extensive. It is a whole area [Tib. gling]. It is one whole side of the Tsangpo Kyichu [Tib. gtsang po skyid chu] River. The end of the area is close to Drepung. The upper area may be up to Jogpori. Anyway, here vegetables were grown. The vegetables were of excellent quality. The Chinese were good at this and they had an exhibition at Tsidrun Lingka. Their radishes [Tib. gya la phug] were probably 3 times the size of this thermos flask. Like a small baby. The Chinese cabbage they had planted was enormous and the quality was excellent, however, it was just about sufficient for them and it was never brought to the city. The people had cheap and good quality vegetables. Our vegetables came from a number of growers who were called Tse Yangjen [Ch. cai yuan zi], in places like Tsemey [Tib. tshal smad] and Yuthok Shar, and all over. They were quite extensive. Next to the meat market was the vegetable market. The price was high but they were not short of vegetables. After the Chinese started planting, then they did not use the vegetable market very much.

Q: When did this take place?

A: This was around 1957-58.

Q: When they came up in 1951, in 52-53, did they start planting at Nortölinga?

A: I think they may have begun around 53-54, but I cannot tell you for sure.

Q: When the Chinese came to Lhasa and the price of vegetables increased. No matter what country we speak of, it is always the poor that suffer more, isn't it? If one had money, one could buy as much as possible, right? There may not have been a shortage, right? I doubt that there was a shortage.

A: Yes .

Q: So during this time, trading was better, and whether we speak of the gerpa or the labrang, did their trading improve? I'm not talking just in Lhasa, but since the Chinese had come, there were a lot of things that they needed, whether it was something the military camps needed [et cetera] and so, whether it were the traders, gerpa or labrang, did their trade improve a lot after the Chinese came?

A: The Chinese needed a lot of construction materials from India, like steel, hammers, shovels, pick axes and other steel products, and iron pans for carrying mud.

Q: The one you carry like this ?

A: No, not that. Like a wash basin. The one the coolies carry on their heads.

Q: Yes, yes, yes.

A: Yes, like that. The Chinese ordered it and the traders took the money out from the Calcutta Bank and brought the items back, and they made a good profit. So there was a section of those people who may have done quite well. Then for the students, [items] like pens and books [were brought back]. Anyway, all the necessary items that the Chinese needed were ordered through traders and they brought them. The requirements of the soldiers, the vegetables, and grains were not bought from the people, nor did the people go and sell [them] at the military camps. The Chinese requested [to] the government that the items were transported and the prices were paid at that time. They did not go to the town and the countryside to buy at the market, nor [did they] go to houses and make relations, except [with the] cadres.

Q: One reason I am asking this question on economics is that, generally, when a lot of people trade and make money, they do not think much about politics. So during this time, I sometimes wonder how much [of a] difference this made for the traders and others. Let me ask you about that.

A: Generally, Tibetans are not the kind of people who understand and think quickly [Tib. klad pa bsir po], and [who] are politically minded. The general populace just went about their business, and they were law abiding, like doing their tax obligations, agricultural work, and nomadic work. The country itself was not politically active [Tib. 'khrug cha] and the people didn't think about politics. So there was no political education from the government. There was not even a newspaper. However, like second nature, their outlook was very hard headed. Like one household, they were single-minded as to being Tibetans and internally, they had mental solidarity [Tib. bsam blo sgril] and there were almost none who interacted with the Chinese for profit, or ran after the Chinese, played them up and flattered them. There maybe was one or two, but the general populace never liked the Chinese. They hated them. For example, if one went to sell to the Chinese, they paid very well. If one planted some garlic and went to the Chinese to sell it, they would have given whatever price one asked. But, the general populace never entertained the idea of going to the Chinese doorsteps. To sell at the market was alright, but the idea of going to the Chinese to sell was an impossibility. So people were that hard-headed. What they thought was that the Chinese were going to destroy the religion [Tib. nyam chag]. They did not think much that the political power of the government [was] being taken away. They didn't quite understand political power. They thought that having come to the country, [the Chinese] would finally destroy the Buddhist faith and make the country completely black. This was the main reason why people all over did not like the Chinese.

Q: It seems that as far as trade is concerned, there was an office dealing with trade.

A: There must have been. But since I had no dealings with the Chinese, I cannot tell you for sure.

Q: Yes, yes. Some were saying they paid well for the goods but later they didn't give good prices and did not take delivery, is this [correct]?

A: This really did take place.

Q: How did this take place, and when did it start?

A: It was probably around 1957-58. In '55, '56, the trading was working well. By 1957, '58, I don't think there was much trade. On the one hand, there were orders from China and traders went down to China. And instead of leaving things as before, they taxed the items. I had a friend by the name of Jogla who came with me from Norbulinga [to India in '59]. He is presently working at Calcutta in the Kunga Hotel. Jogla used to work for Tsöna Tsongkhag [Tib. tshos nag tshong khag]. The Chinese ordered from Tsöna Tsongkhag and they used to procure items from India, and Jogla used to take them to China. There they were stopped and they taxed the items. Anyway, Tsöna Tsongkhag was sent to China and lost a lot. They did previously go to India and did well. Later, the Chinese ordered a lot and when they got down there [to China], they reduced the prices and made them become bankrupt. So Jogla used to always talk about this. They first ordered, then they did not collect and later they definitely made it difficult for the traders.

Q: So later, what was happening was that their policy was changing?

A: Yes. At first they allowed the traders to hop up [Tib. 'phag 'tshag rgyag], and they should have known how much capital each had. Then they asked many questions and made them open the loads. And when the items were shown, it would be according to their capital. Later when all was set, their intention was to make the traders become bankrupt.

Q: Later the policy was changed, right?

A: Yes.